

In the classic novel *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Bronte wrote that “prejudices [...] are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilised by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones”. As an avid reader of classical literature growing up in Dublin, Ireland, I am not really sure why this line stuck with me at the time, but upon reflection it seems that even at a young age I had decided to do my best to evoke awareness of injustice by becoming a teacher - without even realising it! Jane Eyre, as a character, was always a heroine of mine, so of course, taking *her* job and my love of literature there was really no other way to go other than a teacher of English literature - with a separate interest and further study into philosophy, religion and ethics. I pursued my studies and degrees from my hometown at Dublin City University and qualified a decade ago - much to my dismay when I realised this!

I originally opted not to use my education degree until I decided that I wanted to travel. In 2013 I spent 4 months volunteering as a teacher in India, and I have spent the last 7 years teaching in Kuwait, with one year in Sri Lanka, and have been exposed to multiple education systems, institutes and curriculum. I have always rooted my teaching and leadership, within education, in the idea that all educators must “be guardians of spaces that allow students to breathe, be curious, and to explore” (Brene Brown). When we give learners, of all ages, the safe space and guidance to reach their potential we give them the courage to face what it takes to flourish, whatever that looks like to each individual, while demonstrating that it is ok for us to depend on others to help us succeed.

My personal teaching practice has always been to build a village within the classroom where everyone has something to offer. I believe in providing safe spaces, before the delivery of academic content, for learners to fully assess their strengths and opportunities for improvement, to set goals and keep their futures at the forefront of their learning. Within my classroom learners are encouraged to use the skills provided in my specialist subject to have deeper engagement with their personal areas of interest, and are offered choice and voice in how best to demonstrate their learning. My students are aware that I expect high levels of engagement and participation, and I have frequently felt proud to see them rise to the expectations rather than shy away from them, even if they have found them challenging. I have often witnessed their bravery to be vulnerable enough to do what they can to the best of their ability. Learners will often witness me, as their teacher, work alongside colleagues in the classroom to develop the most impactful learning experiences for them, and are encouraged to reach out to their peers to do the same.

A teaching practice I would encourage everyone to try is Genius Hour. What Genius Hour allows students to do is pick their own project and learning outcomes, while still hitting all the standards and skills for their grade level. In fact, these students often go “above and beyond” their standards by reaching for a greater depth of knowledge than most curriculum tends to allow. The idea for Genius Hour (or 20% time projects) in schools comes from Google’s own 20% policy, where employees are given twenty percent of their time to work and innovate on something else besides their current project. It’s been very successful in business practice, and now we can say that it has been successful in education practice. With Genius Hour and 20% time, we can solve one of school’s biggest problems by giving students a purpose for learning and a conduit for their passions and interests.

As educators, I believe we are the guardians and guides of learning journeys rooted in honesty, equity and excellence.